

## Against the Grain

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# Issues in Vendor/Library Relations -- Old

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*The Daily Show*). She chided **Mr. Stewart** for not having a blog. He was most respectful and a bit bemused as he tried to explain to her that his show was how he communicated and that the material that he and his writers rejected was dross and that he was afraid that after writing his show, he had nothing left. The hint that I took was that he was giving us his all, his best and had too much pride to put the rejected material out there for others to see.

One of my daily routines is to walk around the library. I want to ensure that we are keeping it clean and presentable. I count the number of laptops that students are using. I see how students are using the library, how they are congregating, where they go for quiet study, and how trusting they are when they leave backpacks and computers unattended while they go to pick up a print job, grab a cup of coffee, or use the facilities.

As I walk around, I often wander through the stacks, varying the route among LC classes, reference books, bound periodicals, and current periodicals. I despair at times at all that I don't know and how little I have read even compared with the small subset of all printed materials that we have collected here at **St. Edward's**

**University**. I look at our long run of the *Yale Review* and pull a dusty volume off the shelf, the one that contains issues from 1942-1943, the one closest to the month and year in which I was born. I recognize **Dorothy Canfield's** name and I even knew her short story, "The Knothole." In the Autumn 1942 issue, **Eudora Welty's** "Asphodel" appears. If I went through the other issues, I would find countless other stories and essays that would resonate some 66 years after their initial appearance. What is going to happen to all of those treasure troves of fact and fiction when we get rid of our bound journals as we must? They are not being consulted and we need to make room for additional study space. Perhaps I will request the two volumes that cover 1943, each one of which would provide a change of pace when I simply want a piece of good writing to accompany the smell and sound of a soft rain somewhere in rural Oregon. And those who contributed to *The Yale Review* will not have done so in vain.

There is the history section taunting me and my ignorance of the past. The science section is even more scornful of me, someone who, in high school, walked out of chemistry on the first day and signed up for Latin as an easy out. I could go on but you get the point. There are more than 100,000 volumes sitting on our shelves ready to share the learning, wis-

dom, and imagination of thousands of writers — scholars, poets, novelists, humorists. Where do I begin? Never mind, I have my own sub-set at home that I have selected to last me through retirement. And I won't even get through them because there are those other books that I have yet to buy or borrow.

If I want to blitz my friends and family with a thought or a fact about my life that I think they might be interested in, I post it on **Facebook**. That does not make me a blogger. If I posted something once or more a day, however, I would be suspect.

I would rather write letters and postcards and send them to friends and family. Each post card message is written especially for the recipient. Even when writing about the same, I try to vary the wording for my own sake if nothing else. If I used up my time blogging, I might not be able to write my forty or so postcards a month to readers important to me and who really care.

So if you are not a blogger but have considered entering the fray, consider instead just picking up pen and paper and writing a personal note to someone you love or whose friendship you treasure? Studies show that as we get older, we live longer, more satisfying lives when we have friends with whom we can share the good along with the pain. You won't regret it. 🐾

## Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Old

Column Editor: **Bob Nardini** (Group Director, Client Integration and Head Bibliographer, Coutts Information Services)  
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**I**nformation Resources, which until recently was Collection Management, and for years before that was Collection Development, once librarians reworked a duty that had mainly consisted of taking order cards from professors when they got around to submitting them, used to center on new books.

That was when new books were so important that most libraries made sure they were the first thing you saw when walking in the front door. In the back, a lot of librarians spent good long careers choosing the latest books to fill their library's showpiece New Book Shelf, or running the approval plan that re-stocked it every week.

Lately, though, things have changed. Somehow the idea of new got old.

Like so many other troubles, maybe it began with journals. Once they became impossibly expensive, the new journals were nothing but a headache, a series of headaches really. You couldn't find them in the **OPAC**. Then it was one serials review after another. Meanwhile, do we sign on to the Big Deal or not? Then someone invented **JSTOR** and **Project MUSE**. These were exciting projects. We were getting somewhere.



Serials were fun again. Old serials, that is.

Then libraries re-discovered their special collections. Not that they'd forgotten them exactly, but the closest thing to today's airport **TSA** routines used to be applying to use the relics kept under lock and key in wood-paneled rooms that had the only decent tables and chairs — often unoccupied — in the entire library. Leave everything you have with me, please. Here's your pencil. By the way, we close at 4:30. See you Monday morning.

But digitization workshops and the Web turned that around and libraries figured out that they could put themselves on the map by mounting online displays of, well, their maps, not to mention their old letters, diaries, manuscripts, music, records, books, whatever.

With new books, you weren't allowed to do that and nobody would have tried in any case. Until **Google**.

As usual, **Google** changed everything. They went public in 2004, came away with a billion dollars or so, and set out to spend the cash. Within a few months they'd launched **Google Print**, which by now as **Google Book Search**, a project the company charmingly refers to as still in "beta," has digitized some seven million books, is on

course to digitize all the rest ever printed, and in the course of that to upend every last corner of the book world.

New books are there, yes, but anyone who cared to could have found them anyway, on **Amazon**, at **Barnes & Noble**, on publisher sites, and other places. All they'd find though is what the publishers served up to entice a reader to buy the book. Maybe an excerpt. A chapter, even. The jacket. The price. Some blurbs. Not much more.

Most by far of those seven **Google** million books, though, are old. People's attitude toward old books has always landed, usually, somewhere between uninterest and disdain. In *The Devil's Dictionary*, in fact, **Ambrose Bierce's** definition for the word "old" was: "In that stage of usefulness which is not inconsistent with general inefficiency, as an *old man*. Discredited by lapse of time and offensive to the popular taste, as an *old book*."

Suddenly the joke is on **Bierce**, though, because today all the action is in old books. **Google's** \$125 million settlement and 134-page agreement with the **Author's Guild** and **Association of American Publishers** was mostly about old books, the ones out-of-print but still in copyright, rights largely abandoned by authors and publishers until **Google** in effect decided to republish them. Now everyone is recalculating the worth of old books whose fate

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not long ago would more likely have been the dumpster than this kind of headline status. A measure of their value, in one sense or another, is that among the parties lining up to challenge or at least question the **Google** settlement are people who range from the **American Library Association**, to **Microsoft**, to the **Internet Archive**, to the **U.S. Department of Justice**.

Just try "**Ambrose Bierce**" in **Google Book Search**. The results, as of today, add up to 2,862 works where **Bierce** was author or subject or was somewhere mentioned. (A short while ago, in this column's first draft, **Bierce's** total was 2,604.) He disappeared into Mexico in 1913 and nobody knows what became of him. But today wherever his spirit resides, we can be sure **Bierce** is commenting mordantly as **Google** and others go to work to figure out how, whether through advertising or subscriptions or eBooks or print-on-demand or re-publication or something else, they might turn a little profit on his online legacy.

Anyone coming across a reference to **Bierce's** dictionary could right away, with access to the **Google** database, be immersed in that book and maybe then in the rest of the **Bierce** corpus as represented by these 2,862 manifestations of him. For students who shared some degree of his sardonic outlook on the world, this might lead to enough interest to write a paper. Those 2,862 bits of **Bierce** and whatever else found online would certainly provide most of the material needed.

For many students, there's no doubt it would be *all* the material needed — what **Google Book** would bring alongside **Wikipedia** and whatever else the student managed to find online.

What else would there be, anyway? Well, new books.

Not that there have ever been many new books about **Bierce**; but that's another question and since he was merely an example let's discard him at this point, as he might have expected.

Users will find new books in **Google**, but in an absolute reversal of the world as we've known it, they'll be far less accessible than their out-of-print forebears. For as long as current publisher practice stands up, readers will be able to read only a part or even nothing online of a new book. They'll need to buy their way in, either by visiting a bookstore or by paying for whatever online versions were available.

Or, naturally, they could check the library.

How many students will? Online, after all, new books don't look much different from old books. In fact it's always been true that the only place a newly published book always seems newer than an older book is in a library, where the degree of wear will tell. In a bookstore, while a new book might be placed more prominently, side-by-side there's no difference. Online, often the same story.

Let's face it, today's a rough time for new books. Bookstores are struggling. Book re-

view pages are shrinking. Publishers are cutting staff. Some lists seem thin. The pressure's on to get books out in a hurry on every topic of the moment, to the point that some new books look like blogs. Some of them, of course, *were* blogs not long before. And as we hear all the time, hardly anyone reads let alone buys the new academic monographs that have become so difficult for university presses to publish.

Budgets for books in libraries, which mostly has meant budgets for new books, have been battered for nearly a generation now, first by serials, then by incursions of all sorts of electronic resources. Administrators' trust in the value of expert book selection from their selectors has been on the wane for most of that time and will not be boosted by widely noted reports from **R2 Consulting**, who helpfully note that 40% of all books on the shelves never circulate.

One of the best arguments for buying new books always has been, then you wouldn't have to try to buy them later. That made a good case when the out-of-print business was based on printed catalogs and lists. Finding the book you needed was hard. Today it's easy and the copy you find online might even be cheaper than the new copy you didn't buy. Now the rise of print-on-demand and eBooks threatens the idea of "out-of-print" anyway, since a lot of books may never get there. They'll all be books for the ages, eternal, in terms of availability at least.

A big moment in the development of "collection development" was librarians' wrestling responsibility for book selection from the academic departments. Approval plans were one way they did that. Today, with libraries through "patron selection" programs trying to give back part of that responsibility, with questions in the air about usage of print books, and with its fundamentals little changed since the **Richard Abel Company** era, the approval plan is something of a remnant from the early days of "collection development." Like the rest of the book budget, approval plans have taken their lumps from serials and electronic resources. But they're still substantial vehicles, at many libraries accounting for hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual spending on new books.

Now the day doesn't look far off when libraries will be able to buy most of these books anytime, later, when needed, perhaps at the moment a patron asks, maybe as a print book, maybe as an eBook. The approval plan is basically a bet that the portfolio will hold value, through use, and not deliver weekly cartons of toxic assets. Can the approval plan investment as it stands survive without a downgrade, or can the investment be restructured to adapt to a world that's changed?

Maybe the best thing going for new books is that all the old books looking so good right now once were new too, before they got old. 🍄

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## Building Library Collections in the 21st Century — If I Were Reborn as a Librarian Today

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**T**hose of us who are acquisitions and collection development librarians of a certain age have had to learn many new things in our professional careers. To begin with, everything that we now know about computers, most of it at least, was learned after and outside of library school. Some began, as I did, in nearly total precomputer librarianship. I actually learned elementary computer programming at **Indiana University** as part of the MLS curriculum. I had just completed my BA and I was fortunate to have **Alan Pratt** as an instructor in Introduction to Data Processing at **IU** as I began my MLS education. I learned important concepts that I find useful to this day. Older librarians, including some directors were in my class because they were getting their PhDs and this was the new thing and required for them to lead their libraries back home to be libraries of the future. I was actually born as an MLS degreed librarian in August 1973. I went directly from my undergraduate degree to library school. I'm not as old as you might think.

Most of us have now worked with person-

al computers or **Macs** for decades as well as all of the basic and not so basic software that they run. We have been on the front lines of helping create, beta testing, and adopting early library systems and several generations of systems after them. We welcomed the library systems that automated many functions of acquisitions and serial control. We have bought and used numerous commercial databases, and created them ourselves. There are new things, materials and concepts coming along all the time. We strive to keep up with them.

As acquisitions librarians we have had to learn a lot more business and economics than was once the case. Buying books was once a gentlemanly pursuit. I happened to get the opportunity to work for a subscription service in Europe and one in the U.S., so I can claim real world business experience which at one time just didn't happen. Working for serials businesses and learning the basic concepts of business was better education for what I do

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